13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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many of the stones are set vertically or diagonally.[1] Others of the same character, or equally massive earthen banks, may be observed to radiate from some of the raths or 'Danish forts' which we now know to have been farmsteads of the Dark Ages and, since they seem to have been single farms held in severalty, the enclosures which they presuppose are likely to be co-eval with the raths. Indeed Professor O'Riordain has claimed that the existing earthen field fences around the group of raths at Cush in Co. Limerick closely follow those of the late Bronze Age which were 'essentially similar' . . . 'the present-day field system is the direct descendant of the ancient one'.[2]

Much smaller and more irregular are the walls one sees associated with areas of megalithic settlement, though this may be because of their great age. Indeed one example recently discovered during the excavation of a megalithic tomb in Co. Down, which was older than the construction of the cairn and partly preserved by it, was built in coursed dry-stone work.[3] We have as yet little information to draw on but it seems likely that these oldest walls were mainly the result of the casual piling-up of stones cleared from little patches of cultivated ground. Some of the great walls associated with clachans and referred to above may well be built on the foundations of such lines of stones pitched around and between bedded boulders which could not be moved. Yet the size of some of the stones built into these ancient walls is astonishing. I have watched a loose-limbed farmer, who seemed to inherit the physical characters as well as the skills of the megalith builders, handle with superb ease great boulders which one would think it beyond human power to move. A stout timber or iron bar and a sturdy slipe (Chapter XIII) are the tools used. Alternatively boulders may be buried *in situ* if there is sufficient depth of soil, but until recently there was a reluctance, for superstitious reasons, to break up large stones. I have not come across the old miners' practice of cracking stones with fire,[4] and except near towns or quarries the splitting of field stones by means of wedges, 'plug

[1]O. Davies, loc. cit., 62.
[2]S. P. O'Riordain, *P.R.I.A.*, 45 (1940), 88–181.
[3]A. E. P. Collins and D. M. Waterman, *Millin Bay, a late Neolithic Cairn in Co. Down*, H.M.S.O. (1955), 8.
[4]But A. Young (*Tour*, 2, 115) describes the process near Killarney in 1778.

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and feathers', or explosives is a comparatively recent development. These methods took a heavy toll of the megalithic monuments of granite-quarrying districts such as the Mourne Mountains in the nineteenth century, though superstitious tales are still told of the misfortunes which befell the stone-workers.

Another type of stone ditch popular in the limestone plain of east Galway is curiously similar to the Scots Galloway dyke and may well have been introduced by improving landlords or their agents. The lower portion of the ditch is a dry wall of small stones about two feet high carefully levelled on top, and on this rests a wall of boulders of lace-work type two or three feet high. The heavy superstructure not only secures the lower part with its weight but, perhaps because of its slight overhang and tottering appearance, is said to deter cattle and sheep from approaching the wall (Fig. 35). The low walls of loosely piled

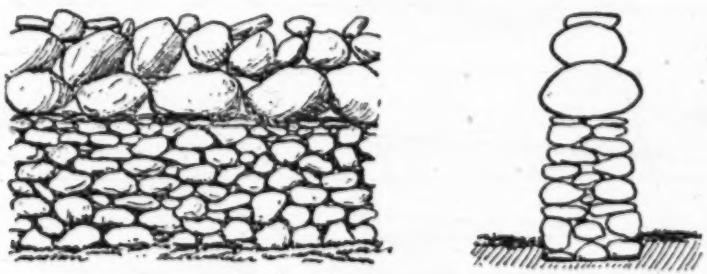

FIG. 35. East Galway ditch of Galloway type, and cross-section.

stones on Rathlin Island are said to act as a deterrent on the principle of the modern electric fence: I was told that animals give them a wide berth once having learnt that they collapse almost at a touch. At the other extreme are the ten-foot walls which run for miles around many demesnes, isolating them physically from the surrounding country so that only at the entrances or the now numerous gaps does one get a glimpse of the decayed grandeur inside. A good many of them are 'famine walls' built to relieve distress during famine years, in return for a meagre allowance of food and a wage of perhaps a few pence per day.